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Comment on the global gaming industry's statement on ICD-11 gaming disorder: a corporate strategy to disregard harm and deflect social responsibility?

King, Daniel L ; et al ; Gruenblatt, Edna ; Walitza, Susanne ; Gaming Industry Response Consortium

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COMMENT ON THE GLOBAL GAMING INDUSTRY'S STATEMENT ON ICD-11 GAMING DISORDER: A CORPORATE STRATEGY TO DISREGARD HARM AND DEFLECT SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY?

Following the announcement that gaming disorder (GD) will be included in the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) [1], multiple gaming industry organizations (henceforth

'the industry') have issued a statement in opposition to GD [2]. The industry advances several arguments, including the notions that: gaming is predominantly enjoyed 'safely and sensibly'; gaming has various personal benefits; the GD evidence base is 'highly contested and inconclusive'; and GD would create moral panic and 'abuse of diagnosis'. We believe that, regardless of whether GD is embraced by all researchers, arguments highlighting the popularity and benefits of gaming and disputing GD should not enable the industry to ignore the global evidence of gaming-related harms. The industry statement does not recognize clinical and public health needs and evidence identifying the adverse impacts of problematic gaming (e.g. social isolation, displaced sleep, physical inactivity and dietary problems, decreased psychological wellbeing, academic or job interference and interpersonal conflicts) [3,4]. Instead, the industry could reflect upon its strong capabilities to protect vulnerable consumers and its share of responsibility for the reduction of gaming-related harms [5].

Corporate strategy refers broadly to a company's pattern of decisions that determines its goals and plans [6]. The gaming industry's corporate strategy involves the pursuit of economic gain from gaming products and services. This strategy is aided by promoting the view that all gaming, without exception, enhances people's quality of life. The industry's statement demonstrates this by: (1) extolling the value and popularity of gaming in absolute terms, without any comment on the risks or harms associated with excessive gaming involvement; (2) drawing a false equivalence between the benefits of educational software and commercial video games in general and ignoring research evidence that finds certain benefits to be negligible [7]; and (3) selectively referring to academics who appear to support the industry's position while ignoring these same authors' acknowledgement in the quoted article that 'there are some people whose play of video games is related to life problems' [8].

The industry is encouraged to recognize the important epidemiological [9–14], neurobiological [15,16] and clinical [17,18] evidence on problematic gaming. Although there is healthy discussion concerning the conceptualization of problematic gaming as a disorder, gaming-related harm is acknowledged by many who oppose the concept of GD [8], and academic debates should not be misused to support the notion that gaming is always innocuous. The industry should recognize that its business model, despite its many successes, has ethical and social responsibilities. Gaming can enrich people's lives, but it can also have adverse impacts and generate harms among vulnerable individuals and their families. As with any product which attracts a disproportionate volume of usage and revenue from a minority of consumers, the industry is encouraged to adopt an approach that minimizes harm and consistently involves responsible practices [19].

Acknowledging gaming-related harms will promote more ethical game design standards and business practices, as well as other organized and collaborative efforts to respond to the needs of problematic users.

Declaration of interests

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Keywords Gaming disorder, harm, ICD-11, industry, public health, social responsibility.

DANIEL L. KING  & Gaming Industry Response Consortium

School of Psychology, The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia

E-mail: daniel.king@adelaide.edu.au

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix S1 The complete list of contributors in the Gaming Industry Response Consortium.